

Concerning The Number Of Rak'aat Of The Taraaweeh Prayer (Q&A)

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Question 2

Question: Is there a specific number (of rak'aat) for the Night Prayer or not?

Answer: There is no specific number (of rak'aat) that one is obligated to abide by when performing the Night Prayer. So if a person spends the whole night in prayer, there is no harm in this. And if he prays twenty rak'aat or fifty rak'aat, there is nothing wrong with this either. However, the best number (of rak'aat) to pray is that which the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to do, which was either eleven or thirteen rak'aat. This is because when the Mother of the Believers, 'Aa'ishah, was asked about how the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam) would pray in Ramadaan, she replied:

"He would not exceed eleven rak'aat whether in Ramadaan or out of it."
[Reported by Al-Bukhaaree (no. 1147) and Muslim (no. 1670)]

However, these rak'aat must be done in the prescribed manner. One must prolong his recitation, bowing, prostrating, standing after bowing, and sitting between prostrations in it. This is contrary to what the people do today – they pray in a rush and prevent the followers from doing what they are required to do in prayer.

An Imaam is a position of leadership. And when someone is a leader, he must do what is best and most fitting (for the people). As for an Imaam not having any concern except to leave early, this is wrong. Rather, a person should do what the Prophet (sallAllahu 'alayhi wa sallam) used to do, such as prolonging his standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting in accordance to what is mentioned in the texts. He should also lengthen his supplication, recitation of the Qur'aan, glorification of Allaah and so on.

Question 3

Question: If a person prays behind an Imaam that performs more than eleven rak'aat, should he follow the Imaam or separate from him after he completes eleven rak'aat?

Answer: The Sunnah is to follow the Imaam since if he leaves before the Imaam finishes praying, he will not achieve the reward of having prayed the entire night. The Messenger of Allaah said:

"Whoever prays with the Imaam until he finishes, it is recorded for him that he prayed the entire night." [Reported by Abu Dawood (no. 1375) and At-Tirmidhee (no. 1806) and authenticated by Al-Albaanee]

The Prophet said this in order to encourage us to strive to remain with the Imaam until he finishes.

The Companions even followed their Imaam at a time when he went beyond the prescribed limit for a particular prayer. And that was when 'Uthmaan bin 'Affaan finished praying four rak'aat at Minaa during Hajj in spite of the fact that the Prophet, Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmaan (himself) – during the first part of his Khilaafah until eight years had passed – used to pray just two rak'aat.

So he prayed four rak'aat and the Companions criticized him for this even though they had followed him and prayed four rak'aat along with him.

Therefore, if this was the guidance of the Companions – which was striving to follow the Imaam until he finished – then what is wrong with some people who when they see the Imaam going beyond the number of rak'aat that the Prophet used to pray at night, i.e. eleven, they get up to leave in the middle of prayer? And we have even witnessed some people in Al-Masjid-ul-Haraam leaving before the Imaam finishes with the excuse that only eleven rak'aat are legislated in the Religion!

Question 36

Question: What is the ruling on the Taraaweeh Prayer and what is the Sunnah with regard to its number of rak'aat?

Answer: The Taraaweeh Prayer is a Sunnah (recommended act) that the Messenger of Allaah prescribed for his ummah. He (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) led his Companions in prayer three nights then left it off for fear that it would be made obligatory on them. So the Muslims remained in this state (of not praying in congregation) afterward during the rule of Abu Bakr and the start of 'Umar's Khilaafah. After this, the Commander of the Believers, 'Umar, gathered them under Tameem Ad-Daaree and Ubay bin Ka'ab. So thereafter they began to pray (Taraaweeh) in congregation up until this time of ours, all praise be to Allaah. It is recommended to do it in Ramadaan.

As for the number of rak'aat to be prayed in it, then it is either eleven or thirteen. This is the Sunnah with regard to the Night Prayer. However, if one goes beyond this number, there is no harm or wrong in this since there were numerous accounts reported on the Salaf (Predecessors) stating that they would vary in the number of rak'aat – either going over or below this number. And they would not rebuke one another for this. So whoever exceeds the prescribed number should not be rebuked. And whoever limits his prayer to the number mentioned in the texts, this is better.

The Sunnah indicates that there is no harm in exceeding the prescribed number since it has been reported in (Saheeh) Al-Bukhaaree and other Collections from the hadeeth of Ibn 'Umar that a man once asked the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) about the Night Prayer, so he responded:

“It is two (rak'aat) by two (rak'aat). Then if one of you fears that the morning (will come upon him), he should pray one (rak'ah), thus making odd (witr) what he prayed.” [Reported by Al-Bukhaaree (no. 990) and Muslim (no. 1695)]

The Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) did not define a specific number to which one can restrict his prayer. Regardless, what is important with regard to the Taraaweeh Prayer is that one must be submissive, attentive and at ease when bowing, prostrating and getting up from these two positions. And he should not do as some people do by rushing through the prayer in a hurried manner, which prevents those praying (behind him) from doing the recommended acts, not to mention the obligatory acts in prayer, simply because he desires to be the first

one out of the masjid so that the large gatherings of people could notice him. This contradicts what is legislated in the Religion.

What is obligatory upon the Imaam is that he fears Allaah with regard to those praying behind him and not prolong the prayer to the point that it burdens his followers and is not in accordance with the Sunnah. He must also not shorten the prayer to the point that those behind him are not able to do what they are obligated or recommended to do while in prayer.

This is why some scholars have stated: "It is disliked for the Imaam to rush through the prayer in such a manner that prevents the one following from doing what is prescribed (in the prayer)."

So if this is the case, then what about those who rush through the prayer in such a manner that prevents the one following from doing what is obligatory (in the prayer)?! This type of rushing is prohibited for the Imaam. We ask Allaah to keep us and our brothers firm and safe.

Question 37

Question: What is the ruling on combining all of the Taraaweeh Prayer or some of it with the Witr in one tasleem?

Answer: Doing such an act invalidates the prayer since the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said:

"The Night Prayer is two (units) by two (units)."

So if he combines all of the rak'aat under one tasleem it will not be two by two. And by doing this he will have opposed the command of Allaah's Messenger (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) when he said:

"Whoever does a deed that is not in accordance with our Command (i.e. Sunnah), it is rejected." [Reported by Muslim (no. 4514)]

Imaam Ahmad, may Allaah have mercy on him, stated: "Whoever rises for the third rak'ah in the Night Prayer (i.e. without making tasleem), it is as if he has risen up to make a third rak'ah when praying Fajr."

Meaning: If he continues to stand up after he remembers, his prayer becomes invalidated, as in the case of the Fajr Prayer. So based on this, if he gets up for the third rak'ah during the Night Prayer out of forgetfulness and then remembers, he should go back (to the sitting position) and make tashahhud. Then he should make the two prostrations of forgetfulness after the tasleem. If he does not do this, his prayer is invalid.

There is an issue I would like to discuss here, which is the understanding that some people derive from the hadeeth of 'Aa'ishah when she was asked about how the Prophet would perform the Night Prayer during Ramadaan. She replied:

"He would not exceed eleven rak'aat (for the Night Prayer) whether in Ramadaan or out of it. He would pray four rak'aat, but do not ask about how fine or long they were. Then he would pray another four rak'aat, but do not ask about how fine or long they were. Then he would pray three rak'aat."

Some people think that based on this, he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would pray the first four rak'aat with one tasleem, the second set of four rak'aat with

one tasleem and the last three rak'aat with one tasleem.

However, even though this hadeeth may imply this meaning, it is also possible that it means that he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) prayed four rak'aat with two tasleems then sat to rest and regain his energy. Then he prayed four more rak'aat in a similar manner (i.e. with two tasleems). This possible meaning, i.e. that he prayed two rak'aat by two rak'aat, seems more correct. However, he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would sit after the first four rak'aat to rest and recoup his energy. And likewise with the second set of four rak'aat, he (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) would pray them two by two, then sit (again).

What supports this conclusion is the Prophet's (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) saying: "The Night Prayer is two by two."

Therefore this conclusion combines both his (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) action as well as his (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) statement. Even though we can derive from the wording that the hadeeth possibly means he would pray these four rak'aat with one tasleem, it is outweighed by the hadeeth we mentioned above, which is that the Prophet (*sallAllaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said: "The Night Prayer is two by two."

If a person wishes to make Witr with three rak'aat, there are two ways of accomplishing this:

1. The first is that he makes the tasleem after the first two rak'aat then prays the third.
2. The second is that he prays all three together with just one tashahhud and one tasleem.